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Kennedy Proposal Would Make Lying to the Public a Crime

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) said yesterday that he will introduce legislation that would make it a crime for government officials to lie to the public.

A spokesman for Kennedy said the proposal was prompted in part by the circumstances surrounding a 1971 effort to keep tht Central Intelligence Agency's illegal mail-intercept program from coming to light.

The Federationo of American Scientists was assured then, in response to a generalized inquiry, that the Post Office Department had no knowledge of efforts by any federal agency to take any mail out of regular postal channels in order "to obtain the information contained

The asurance was given in writing by chief U.S. Postal Inspector William J. Cotter, a former CIA agent who was aware that the agency had been secretly opening mail to and from the Soviet Union since the early 1950s.

Kennedy's proposal would make it a misdemeanor for any government official knowingly to make a false public statement "for the purpose of misleading Congress or the public on matters involving official policy or action of the United States."

The Massachusetts senator plans to introduce the proposal as an amendment to the omnibus bill revising federal criminal laws that is now before the Senate Judiciary Committee. His bill would also make it a crime for government officials to intimidate federal employees from speaking out against official deceit and corruption. Violators would face a maximum penalty of a year in prison and a $10,000 fine.

Supporters of the proposal pointed out that it is already a felony, punishable by five years in prison, for members of the public to make false statements to government investigators, even when not under oath.